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JUN 04 2026

HERNANDO COUNTY
BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Withlacoochee Regional Water Supply Authority

Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Work Program

1. 2024 Regional Water Supply Plan Update

The 2024 Regional Water Supply Plan update is complete. It included population and demand projections, evaluation of water supply sources, conservation and reuse alternatives, and an evaluation of alternative water supply options. This work was co-funded by SWFWMD, and coordinated with their 2025 Northern Region Regional Water Supply Plan, and SJRWMD 2026 Central Springs/East Coast Regional Water Supply Plan update. WRWSA will continue to track water demands and promote water conservation. WRWSA will also continue to track the MFLs within the region and the progress on setting the MFL's for the Withlacoochee River.

2. Joint Funding of Water Conservation Projects with Member Local Governments

The Authority will continue its grant program to assist local governments in improving water supply and conservation within the region in order to extend the use of groundwater as long as possible. Fresh groundwater is the least expensive source available to meet growing demands, however there is a limit to this source due to environmental impacts and impacts on other existing legal users caused by withdrawals. As the limit to fresh groundwater resources is reached, alternative, more expensive water sources will need to be developed. At the present time, water conservation programs are the most appropriate way for the Authority to help local governments extend the use of lower cost groundwater supplies. The 2026-27 proposed budget includes \$185,000 toward local government water supply and conservation projects. Proposals will be considered from local governments and public supply utilities in the Authority's jurisdiction. The grant program guidelines and application package may be found on the Authority's web page at www.wrwsa.org. The water conservation activities co-funded by this grant program help participating utilities meet and surpass the maximum 150 gallons per person per day that is required by the SWFWMD and to meet the SJRWMD conservation requirements.

3. Regional Residential Irrigation Audit Program to Promote Water Conservation within the Region

These ongoing programs provide an opportunity for residential water utility customers to obtain site-specific evaluations for optimizing the use of water through landscaping techniques and efficient irrigation systems, and to implement recommendations provided by a professionally certified contractor. Contractors used for the site-specific evaluations are professionals certified by the Florida Irrigation Society (FIS) or another recognized certifying agency in the targeted region. The initiative includes program information, water conservation education, reporting and analysis by a consultant. This continuing project targets existing inefficient landscape and irrigation water use and results in significant water savings and can lead to water quality protection through reduced leaching of fertilizers and lawn chemicals. 1457 audits have been conducted as part of SWFWMD Phases 1 to 7. In Phase 4, we began offering enhanced audits that have a more intense implementation of improvements, and have an improved benefit to reduce water usage. An average reduction in total water use of 26% has been achieved for the locations that have been audited.

For Phase 8, the program was shifted from the CFI process to the WISE program for SWFWMD funding. This water conservation initiative helps participating utilities meet and surpass the maximum 150 gallons per person per day that is required by the SWFWMD. Phase 9 will continue in FY 2026-27 in the WISE program.

In Fiscal Year 2023-24 we began a new program cofounded by SJRWMD that included Marion County and the City of Belleview as cooperating utilities. This pilot program targeted 60 enhanced evaluations, however only 35 were completed. We have included budget of \$30,000 to move forward with Phase 2 in FY 2026-27.

4. Continued Cooperation with Citrus County in Operation and Management of the Authority's Charles A. Black Water Supply Facilities

The Authority and Citrus County are parties of a Water Supply Contract governing the operation and maintenance of the CABWSF. The Contract allows for the continued operation of the facilities by Citrus County in a cost-effective manner ensuring a long-term water supply for the County and its customers while also providing for long-term financial stability for the Authority.

WRWSA and Citrus County received a renewed Water Use Permit No. 7121 with an increased capacity of 7,181,900 gallons per day. Citrus County deposits an annual contribution to the Renewal and Replacement Fund of \$270,000 to account for inflation, and additional planned activities, and to maintain a balance the required balance of between \$2,000,000 and \$3,000,000.

In FY 2025-2026 an updated Engineering Analysis will be completed identifying a Renewal and Replacement Annual amount of \$300,000 to begin in October 2027.

5. Participation in Maintenance and Enhancement of the Central Springs Groundwater Model

The Authority will continue to participate in discussions with SJRWMD and SWFWMD on the implementation of the Central Springs Groundwater model. The intent is for both water management districts to utilize this common model for determining the availability of groundwater in the region, particularly in Marion County which is split by the districts' boundaries. The SJRWMD and SWFWMD continue to improve upon the model and seek the engagement of various stakeholders. The model has significant implications for groundwater availability in the region and the Authority's continued participation and coordination with member governments is essential to ensure water supply implications are considered as the model is updated. Results from this model were presented in the WRWSA 2024 Regional Water Supply Plan update.

6. Springs Protection and Restoration

The Authority continues to work with the SWFWMD on its springs coast initiative. The Authority staff continue to actively participate in the Springs Coast Management Committee as the public supply Representative, and monitor activities of the District and the Steering Committee for implications on water supply in the region. WRWSA is also providing a representative on the Technical Advisory Committee via one of our As-Needed Consultants.

7. Program Development and Technical Assistance

- a) Support efforts to further define the hydrogeology of the region. Continue cooperation with the water management districts on the collection of hydrologic data to further refine the Districts' planning and regulatory models. Coordinate on efforts to better define the lower Floridan aquifer and the extent of fresh and brackish groundwater within the aquifer.
- b) Promote the WRWSA Regional Framework through coordination with WRWSA member governments to facilitate regional and sub-regional cooperation on water supply development and reclaimed water projects. Work with the WMDs in defining strategic priorities for the region and how these priorities may influence the ranking criteria for the Districts' Cooperative Funding

Initiatives, including potential District funding for regional and sub-regional traditional and non-traditional water supply development that is consistent with the WRWSA Regional Framework.

- c) Participate in the SWFWMD and SJRWMD minimum flows and levels (MFLs) programs representing the interests of member governments. Provide technical assistance to WRWSA member governments in determining the potential impact to both the environment and potential water supply development based on proposed MFLs.
- d) Coordinate with FDEP, SJRWMD, SWFWMD and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on policy and rule development. Provide assistance to WRWSA member governments on FDEP and District rule development that may include Water Use Permitting, Environmental Resource Permitting, water conservation and future water supply development, including the statewide consistency initiatives. Monitor water management programs and rule development in other parts of the state, including the Central Florida Water Initiative, for implications to the WRWSA and its member governments.
- e) Monitor and coordinate with the water supply planning and development activities in adjacent communities and regions, including but not limited to Tampa Bay Water, the Central Florida Water Initiative, the Polk Water Cooperative, and Lake and Levy counties for possible implications on water resource availability within the WRWSA region. Provide input to such activities when appropriate.
- f) Track the public supply water usage and compare it to permitted quantities and estimated demands in the Regional Water Supply Plan Update.
- g) Monitor applications for significant water use permits and permit modifications within the region for potential impacts on WRWSA and member government existing and planned water supply facilities and engage in the permitting process where appropriate.
- h) Monitor and report on activities within the WRWSA service area that may be a concern to the water quality or quantity for public supply usage.
- i) State Legislative tracking will be completed each State legislative session. Relevant bills related to utility operations, water quality, water permitting, land use, and pollution will be tracked and reported on in the WRWSA Board Meetings.